Designing Cultural Training and Education for Non-resident PME

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Designing Cultural Training and Education for Non-resident
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                               to
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In his April 2005 guidance message, Marine Corps Commandant General Michael Hagee stated, "We train and educate our Marines to think independently and act aggressively, with speed and initiative, and to exploit the advantages of cultural understanding."[1] Warfare in the current operating environment has substantiated this statement, demonstrating that all Marines, regardless of rank, will be required to make decisions at the tactical level that may have strategic implications. Such recent events as the Abu Ghraib Prison scandal and the retaking of Fallujah have focused increased attention on the individual actions of today's warfighters. As a result, cultural education and training has become vital in arming our Marines with the necessary skills to make crucial decisions on the battlefield. While programs have been established for units in pre-deployment training cycles and selected resident professional military education (PME) courses, no culture-specific training is available for the majority of enlisted Marines and officers in the Marine Corps who participate in non-resident PME. The Marine Corps must expand existing cultural training and education to non-

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[1] ALMAR 018/05, 33rd Commandant of the Marine Corps Updated Guidance (The 21st Century Marine Corps – Creating Stability in an Unstable World).

resident PME programs in order to prepare Marines for future conflicts.

Current Cultural Awareness Training Methods

The purpose of cultural learning in the Marine Corps is to give Marines the skills they need to "understand what cultural aspects to look for when operating in a new region, improve cross-cultural communication skills, understand the distinctions between the foreign culture and American culture, possess tools that will be applicable regardless of the environment, and perhaps most importantly, enable Marines to gain information on the ground."[2]   New requirements continue to be updated which mandate specific cultural training objectives for units prior to deployments in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom. While many Marine Corps leaders admit that cultural training is essential for accomplishing the mission, few dispute the challenges of providing effective and relevant cultural training to Marines within a compressed pre-deployment cycle. Striking an effective balance between essential warfighting skills and cultural awareness requires Marine leaders to

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[2] Salmoni, Barak, Deputy Director, USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning, interview by Christopher Bower. 18 November, 2005.

prioritize training requirements, which often means that
cultural training receives less attention than it merits.

Pre-deployment preparation for operational units
currently focuses on cultural awareness training, while
selected resident PME schools such as the Sergeants Course,
The Basic School (TBS), and Expeditionary Warfare School
(EWS) focus on both training and cultural education.
Training is designed to make Marines proficient in
specified skills as applied to tasks through doctrinally-
based instruction. In contrast, education focuses on
critical thinking, the ability to comprehend abstract
concepts, and a higher degree of understanding that is
often non-doctrinally based.[3] The value of cultural
education is enhanced in a formal resident school
environment by providing a longer period of time for
Marines to comprehend new concepts and to interact with
their peers through independent study, reading, discussion,
and practical exercises. On the contrary, cultural
training during a pre-deployment cycle is often taught
through short classes, focusing on fact-based information
instead of critical thinking or interaction.

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[3] Transforming the Warrior Diplomat. Jeff D. Hudson and Steven A.
Warman. Naval Post-Graduate School, June, 2005.

The Argument for Non-Resident PME

Non-resident PME has traditionally been a cost effective way of educating Marines without depleting the operating forces of manpower and uprooting families for year-long assignments to attend resident schools. In addition, the current high operational tempo, limited school seats, and lack of mandatory resident school attendance for promotion have resulted in the vast majority of Marines completing their PME through non-resident study. For example, only twenty percent of all Marine captains attend the Expeditionary Warfare School. The remaining captains complete the requirement through the Distance Education Program. Enlisted Marines are affected as well; junior Marines who are not scheduled to attend the Corporals Course or Sergeants Course for several years have few options for equivalent cultural training.

Language and cultural concepts being taught at resident programs are providing Marines with tools which are assisting them in their day to day interaction with local populations in Iraq, eastern Africa, Afghanistan, and various other locations in the current operating environment. Marines armed with cultural knowledge are making better decisions on the battlefield while simultaneously avoiding or reducing tension with indigenous

populations. Sadly, many Marines who do not attend these programs consider cultural learning a waste of time, primarily because they have had limited exposure to it. Changing the mindset of Marines, particularly SNCOs and NCOs who have the greatest impact on young Marines, is crucial.[4] Including enhanced cultural training and education in non-resident PME should help overcome such biases by taking the best aspects of both formal PME and pre-deployment training.

A Model for Cultural Education

The Marine Corps should look to current cultural awareness training and education programs being instituted at TBS and EWS as a starting point. These programs were designed in large part at the U.S. Marine Corps Center for Operational Cultural Learning (CAOCL), an organization created in response to the cultural challenges of the current operating environment.[5] While CAOCL remains primarily focused on pre-deployment training for the operating forces, the center is expanding its role in developing cultural curriculum for selected resident PME schools.

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[4] Capt David J. Danelo, USMCR, "The Linguistic Tipping Point." *Marine Corps Gazette*, October 2005.

[5] For more information, see www.tecom.usmc.mil/caocl/.

The curriculum at each of the formal schools has been

tailored to the rank, experience, and level of

responsibility of the students. New lieutenants at TBS

receive an introduction to cultural concepts and issues

focused on navigating cultural terrain, cultural learning

as a critical component in operational planning, and

cultural dynamics during the execution phase of an

operation. Guided book discussions, classroom instruction,

and tactical decision games (TDGs) are used.[6] In contrast,

the curriculum at EWS is tailored to captains who will

return to the operating forces as company commanders. It

requires more intensive reading on a broader range of

topics involving culture in the current operating

environment, language familiarization and cultural

training.[7] The TBS curriculum consists of over seven hours

of cultural instruction and training while the EWS

curriculum contains over twenty hours of training,

discussion, and practical application.

Both of these programs contain elements that can

easily be adopted into existing non-resident PME. Non-

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[6] Introduction to Cultural Awareness for the Warfighter, BOK8610
Student Handout, The Basic School, 2005.

[7] Current Operations: Cultural Enhancement Program, Expeditionary
Warfare School Operational Culture Current Operating Environment
Reading Program Binder, Volume I, Version 1.3, Expeditionary Warfare
School, 2005.

resident PME for junior Marines should include a mandatory Distance Education Program available online from the Marine Corps Institute (MCI), which focuses on an introduction to cultural issues. This MCI should include required reading on current cultural issues, discussion of key concepts with a senior NCO or SNCO, and TDGs that would be tailored to the experience level of a junior Marine.

Established non-commissioned officer PME courses would require revisions to incorporate cultural training. These courses include the Corporals Course, the Sergeants Distance Education Program (SDEP), the Staff Noncommissioned Officers Career Distance Education Program (SNCOCDEP), and the Staff Noncommissioned Officers Advanced Distance Education Program (SNCOADEP). Several of these non-resident programs are mandatory for promotion and are required in order for a Marine to attend the equivalent resident school. [8] Cultural classes should concentrate on decision-making and navigating the cultural environment. They should also include the Tactical Iraqi DARPA computer program currently being used at EWS. Required reading must focus on a wide range of topics to broaden the knowledge

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[8] For a description of these courses and their current curriculum, see the Marine Corps Training and Education Command (TECOM) Enlisted Professional Military Education page at http://www.mcu.usmc.mil/sncoa/DEP/index.cfm

base of enlisted leaders who will confront these cultural challenges firsthand.

The EWS distance learning program and the Command and Staff (CSC) distance learning program are currently based on their respective resident PME courses and can be updated to include the current cultural curriculum. The EWS program can serve as the model, with further educational considerations for field-grade officers enrolled in the CSC non-resident program.

The Challenges

Making the non-resident PME curriculum equivalent to resident PME is necessary; however, critics will argue that there are numerous drawbacks to instituting these changes. First, the added cultural requirements will make the non-resident curriculum longer, requiring more time for Marines to complete their PME. Simply extending the deadlines to enable Marines to complete the new material appears an obvious solution; however, this extension will likely raise concerns with Marines who are already struggling to finish their PME prior to promotion consideration.

There is also the potential for making the training too Iraq specific. While Iraq is the primary focus in the current operating environment, cultural training should give Marines a strong foundation in cultural concepts that

they can apply in any environment. This problem is not solely specific to non-resident PME; all cultural learning programs in the Marine Corps must maintain a balance between specific information needed in the current operating environment and concepts that will be needed for the future.

Finally, cultural training and education in non-resident PME will lack the interaction between Marines that is found in resident programs. Non-resident PME is largely an individual effort, which reduces the likelihood that Marines will have a forum to discuss and debate cultural concepts. Non-resident seminars are one possible solution to this problem; however, they are very difficult for Marines to attend due to the current operational tempo. A more realistic proposal which would foster discussion and interaction among Marines would be required cultural reading assignments. The Marine Corps Recommended Reading List offers numerous books that deal with cultural issues and challenges in the current operating environment that can serve as the foundation for improving cultural dialogue between Marines.

Conclusion

The Marine Corps has rapidly progressed in its goal to bring cultural awareness training and education to the

forefront of military preparedness by improving its current programs. However, it is essential that the Marine Corps provide this opportunity to all Marines, regardless of how they attain their PME completion. Non-resident PME curriculum must reflect the training and education presented in the formal schools and enhance the training Marines receive prior to deploying into combat. By ignoring cultural learning as an integral part of non-resident PME programs, the Marine Corps risks sending Marines into combat without the proper training, which may result in tactical blunders with strategic implications.

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